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RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA PRIORITY 6618
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON PRIORITY 1657
RUEHDO/AMEMBASSY DOHA PRIORITY 0121
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
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TAGS: PGOV PHUM PINS KDEM TH

SUBJECT: JANUARY 29 UPDATE: MARTIAL LAW FORMALLY LIFTED IN MOST PROVINCES

REF: A. BANGKOK 545 (JAN 26 UPDATE)
 1B. BANGKOK 524 (NITYA MEETING)
 1C. 05 BANGKOK 7918

Classified By: DCM Alex A. Arvizu, reason: 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

11. (C) A royal command lifting martial law in most of Thailand's provinces has now taken effect. The police have released all suspects detained in connection with the December 31 bombings. Acts of violence continue in Thailand's southern border provinces, with a roadside bomb exploding after the passage of the Minister of Interior's convoy. Fires broke out in schoolhouses in two provinces, with arson appearing probable in one of the cases; schoolhouse burnings feed authorities' concern about subversive "undercurrents." End Summary.

MARTIAL LAW LIFTED IN MOST PROVINCES

12. (C) On January 26, the Royal Gazette published the long-awaited royal command lifting martial law in a majority of Thailand's provinces. It remains unclear whether the formal revision in these areas will have much effect, as many of our contacts have seemed unaware that martial law remained in effect after the cabinet announced in December its decision to ease restrictions. Post has previously e-mailed maps to EAP/MLS showing where martial law would remain in effect after the formal revision.

BOMBING SUSPECTS RELEASED

13. (C) Media reports claim that the police have determined they lack evidence to continue holding all those detained in connection with the December 31 Bangkok bombings, and the 19 people -- including 14 military officers -- have been released but remain under surveillance. Since the police announced it had detained the 19 people, leading military figures publicly warned Royal Thai Police (RTP) Chief Kowit Wattana that he would be held personally responsible if the suspects had been detained unjustly. Council for National Security (CNS) Chairman Sonthi Boonyaratglin downplayed the significance of the soldiers having materials that could be used to construct bombs, saying he himself kept ammunition at his home. At least one press report claimed the police gave the released men 3,000 Baht (around 80 USD) as "hush money."

Meanwhile, Australian officials working with the Thai on this case have told us privately they intend not to issue a report on their findings, as they believe the investigation has become overly politicized.

BOMB EXPLODES IN SOUTH DURING INTERIOR MINISTER'S VISIT

¶4. (U) On January 28, a bomb planted in a roadside house in the southern border province of Pattani exploded 15 minutes after the passage of the motorcade of Interior Minister Aree Wongarya, who was accompanied by visiting Qatari Islamic Affairs Minister Faisal bin Abdullah al-Mahmoud. As with other attacks in the far South, no one claimed responsibility for the bombing and there was no specific evidence that Aree or the minister were deliberately targeted. Aree and Faisal were visiting the campus of Yala Islamic College (ref C) to dedicate a new building financed by the government of Qatar. Prime Minister Surayud Chulanont also visited southern Thailand on January 27, his third visit since becoming PM.

SCHOOLHOUSES BURNED

¶5. (C) Two fires broke out in schoolhouses on January 27, causing minor damage. The cause of one fire, in Tak province, may have been accidental. The other, in Surin province, appeared to be deliberately set. While these incidents do not appear highly significant to us, we note that our Thai interlocutors frequently cite schoolhouse fires as evidence of "undercurrents" and justification for continuing a state of high alert. (See, for example, ref B.)
BOYCE